

## RELATED TERMS

- Communication
- Incident Command
- Quarantine



## Lessons Learned Information Sharing

www.LLIS.gov

## PRIMARY DISCIPLINES

- Fire
- Law Enforcement
- Emergency Management
- Emergency Communications

# LESSON LEARNED

## Biological Terrorism: Direct Contact with Persons Sheltered-in-Place

### SUMMARY

During a suspected biological terrorist incident, incident command (IC) should consider establishing direct communications via telephone, walkie-talkie, or some other device with persons sheltered-in-place. Communications should always remain open so that IC can channel information through a single source, thus eliminating the spread of conflicting information or instructions to sheltered persons.

### DESCRIPTION

On April 24, 1997, a suspicious package was discovered in the Washington, DC offices of B'nai B'rith, an international Jewish organization. It contained a Petri dish labeled *Anthraxis Yersinia*, an incorrect combination of two different biological agents. The District of Columbia Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department (DCFEMS) responded to the scene and decided to shelter-in-place B'nai B'rith building occupants as a precautionary measure. The IC established direct phone communications with those inside the building to relay information and instructions.

However, the line was not kept open during the entire nine-hour incident response. As a result, IC was unaware that other local officials were contacting building occupants and issuing conflicting instructions. Officials from the DC Health Department, acting on advice from their own national technical experts, told building occupants to leave the building, contrary to the IC's instructions.

During an event when persons are sheltered-in-place, IC should consider establishing direct communications with a single point of contact with those sheltered. It is essential to keep the phone line open at all times to ensure that sheltered persons receive information only from IC.

### CITATION

- US Fire Administration. *Fire Department Response to Biological Threat at B'nai B'rith Headquarters, Washington, DC.* April 1997. ([LLIS.gov ID# 158](#))

### DISCLAIMER

*Lessons Learned Information Sharing (LLIS.gov)* is the US Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency's national online network of lessons learned, best practices, and innovative ideas for the emergency response and homeland security communities. The Web site and its contents are provided for informational

purposes only, without warranty or guarantee of any kind, and do not represent the official positions of the US Department of Homeland Security. For more information on *LLIS.gov*, please email [Feedback@llis.dhs.gov](mailto:Feedback@llis.dhs.gov) or visit [www.llis.gov](http://www.llis.gov).